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## **Notes on spatial transformation in post-Cold War Europe and the territory work of the European Union**

Sami Moisio and Juho Luukkonen

### **Introduction**

The spatial structures of Europe are under perpetual transformation. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the intensifying processes of European integration led to a dramatic spatial transformation process in Europe in the 1990s. This transformation process has been discursive and material in nature and has touched both geopolitical and social identities (including collective self-identification: see e.g. Vihalemm & Masso, 2007). The post-Cold War spatial transformation has reminded us that Europe and its internal divisions are both political and social processes whereby actors such as politicians, business people, diplomats, policy makers in various institutional contexts and researchers are in a crucial position in defining, and giving shape and meaning to European space (Paasi, 2001: 13). Simultaneously, however, their actions are inescapably connected to wider political and economic processes of territorialization and reterritorialization.

As a peculiar bureaucracy whose actions and legislation influence European countries on a daily basis and in countless ways, the EU has gradually become a site within which the political and cultural content of Europe and its limits are constantly defined and reworked. It has also become a sort of anchor institution which significantly regulates the political, social and cultural contents and spatial configurations of Europe and which operates through various regionalizing political agendas and the associated funding mechanisms.

As far as the post-Cold War spatial transformation of Europe is concerned, we list five themes which are pertinent and can be regarded as different dimensions of what Jones and Clark (2010) label as the spatialities of Europeanization. Firstly, the territorial expansion of the EU has characterized the debates on European identity since the 1990s. Secondly, Europe has witnessed both EU-orchestrated and more “thematic” regionalization (Adams, 2012) as well as locally and regionally rooted regionalist movements. Thirdly, the deepening political and economic integration in Europe has been coupled with the processes of bordering and de-bordering which concern both the internal and external borders of Europe (Rumford, 2006). Fourthly, the development of the EU’s foreign policy and the recent building up of the European External Action Service (EEAS) has prompted both questions and analysis of the role, image, and power of the EU in international affairs (Bachmann, 2016b; Kuus, 2014; Moisio *et al.*, 2013). Finally, the European integration process has witnessed the emergence of a nascent European spatial planning agenda (and an associated drive towards policy coherence) which discloses efforts to produce a unified territorial lexicon and practices in the name of European territorial cohesion (Moisio & Luukkonen, 2015).

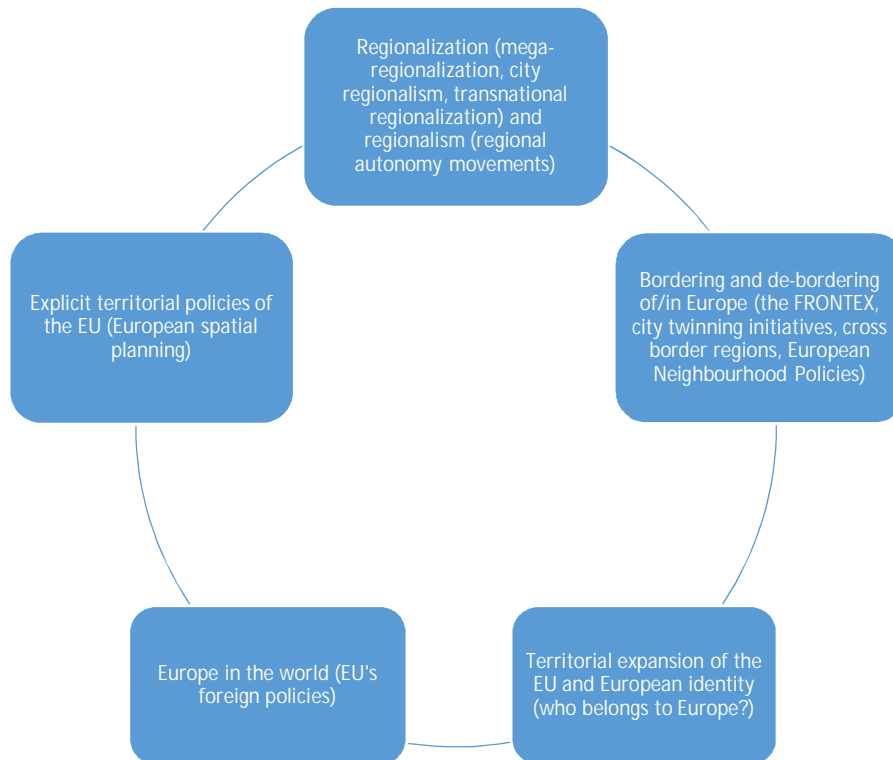


Figure 1. A selected set of the themes of spatial transformation in Europe since the 1990s.

In this chapter, we discuss some of these themes explicitly while we only scratch the surface of some others. The chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly, we discuss geopolitical dynamics in Europe with regard to the post-Cold War enlargement process of the EU in particular. In this context we highlight the essentially contested nature of the concept of Europe and the ways in which the European borders and particular geopolitical identities were articulated in the enlargement process of the EU before the 2004 “big bang” expansion.

Secondly, we focus on the explicit territorial construction of the EU itself in what we call *the territory work of the EU*. We conceptualize the territory work as a key governmental technology through which the EU seeks to diminish the dispute over the varying understandings of Europe and promotes the idea of Europe as a coherent spatial entity. The territory work is primarily coordinated and orchestrated by the European Commission. However, the concept stands for a broader web of

spaces of interaction within which different authorities and experts – the EU officials, academics across Europe, politicians, consultants, and policy makers in cities and regions, as well as different state ministries in the member states and beyond – speak and act in the name of the EU as a territorial object (cf. Bachmann, 2016a: 11; see also Clark & Jones, 2008; Kuus, 2011b). In order to authenticate this claim, the third section discusses the spatial imaginaries and practices of so-called European spatial planning. Rather than highlighting that EU governance is constituted of an interplay between the “EU level”, the “member state level” and the “regional level” (Delanty & Rumford, 2005: 141), we introduce European spatial planning as disclosing the ways in which EU governance has gradually emerged as a set of spatial practices and strategies, and modes of spatial calculation that operate on something called EU territory. Whereas section three elucidates the geopolitics of Europeanization through the concept of EU territory work, section four turns to discuss the theoretical argument with reference to one EU-driven process to construct new spaces for its operations. Brief conclusions follow in the final section.

### **Geopolitical processes and identities in post-Cold War Europe**

Europe is an essentially contested geopolitical process which is constantly articulated in political action. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a political rupture that brought about an intense debate on European identity and the borders of Europe. This debate surfaced not only within the states which gained their independence as a result of the breakup of the Soviet Union: it also emerged within the institutions of the EU which strove for closer political union and a wider territorial basis in the 1990s.

The EU embodies a strong institutional-bureaucratic view of Europe (Paasi, 2011). This view was strongly expressed in the early 1990s when the European Commission set up several criteria of

Europeanness which states needed to meet in order to be treated as eligible for EU membership.

“Europe is both a cause and an effect of EU: its putative cultural basis and its desired goal”, as Kuus (2014: 8) has it. Various narratives on the linkages between European identity and national identity thus came to characterize the spatial transformation which has taken place since the 1990s and culminated in the “eastern expansion” of the EU (which began in the 1990s and was finalized in 2007). One may single out at least four geopolitical aspects of the post-Cold War spatial transformation of Europe.

### *Geopolitical discourses and identities*

Firstly, since the 1990s a number of studies have focused on the geopolitical discourses and related markers of Europe and how these are constitutive of geopolitical identities in different European contexts. Studies on the EU enlargement process demonstrate that geopolitical discourses on Europe, based on persistent markers such as West and East, were actively mobilized by the applicant states in their efforts to distance themselves from the supposed Russian sphere of interest. These geopolitical signifiers played an important role in generating particular moral geographies of Europe. These geographies highlighted the absolute responsibility of the EU to reunify Europe after the years of allegedly artificial separation (Moisio, 2002). Thus East and West – as well as Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Central Europe – were deployed as notable rhetorical resources in political action (see, among others, Clark & Jones, 2012; Jeffrey, 2008; Moisio, 2007).

The research on EU enlargement has highlighted the ways in which the processes of othering and exclusion, and associated identity politics were integral parts of political action in Europe in the 1990s and after, as well as the constitutive aspects of the interaction between EU institutions and applicant states. Indeed, the “return to Europe” discourse operationalized by some applicants during

the accession process was predicated upon long-standing geographical concepts such as Central Europe which played an interesting role in the identity political narratives championed by various cultural-political elites and intellectuals (Hagen, 2003; Kuus, 2007; Moisio, 2002).

Identity politics and related geopolitical reasoning have been central features of the EU expansion since the 1990s and have not been restricted to the former “East Europeans”. For instance, the domestic campaigning Finnish membership in the EU was not only legitimized by appeals about the material benefits of membership but also by identity politics regarding the location of Finland with relation to Western Europe. It was about acquiring a particular political geographical recognition among Europeans (Moisio, 2008; Moisio *et al.*, 2011). EU membership has served identity political purposes in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe too (Kuus, 2007).

#### *The question of a “European neighbourhood”*

Secondly, the eastern expansion of the EU generated new neighbours. Kuus (2014), in particular, has scrutinized the Eastern direction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) by looking at how the representatives of the so-called new EU member states deploy specific geographical knowledge claims on the neighbourhood as expertise that is rooted in their putative geopolitical experience. The motivation for such research stems from the fact that the new EU neighbours have been targeted through new policies which have brought the neighbouring states and regions into the EU’s sphere of influence (see e.g. the contributions in Bialasiewicz, 2011).

The pre- and post-enlargement shaping of a “European neighbourhood” has been a peculiar process of inclusion and exclusion, and cooperation and securitization, as well as bordering and regionalization – a process which cannot be conceptualized in research through simplistic spatial

dichotomies such as being either outside and inside the EU (for a useful discussion, see Celata & Coletti, 2016). The different policy transfers and policy diffusions associated with the ENP have rather constructed the EU's neighbourhood as a geopolitical site of learning in which the transformative power of the EU vis-à-vis its outside has been in operation (in the Mediterranean, see e.g. Jones, 2006, 2011; in East-Central Europe, see e.g. Browning & Joenniemi, 2008).

### *Border practices*

Thirdly, post-Cold War European spatial transformation has been characterized by differentiated border practices of inclusion and exclusion across the EU and even beyond (Andrijasevic & Walters, 2010; Scott, 2005; Scott & Van Houtum, 2009; Walters, 2004). Indeed, as European states and institutions increasingly take recourse to a variety of externalised and “off-shore” border arrangements, European border-making growingly exerts a powerful influence on the EU's image and power, both in its immediate neighbourhoods and the wider world (see e.g. Bigo & Guild, 2005; Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2012; Van Houtum, 2010).

European borders have become an immensely heated geopolitical phenomenon in 2016. Firstly, migrants from a range of geographical contexts have experienced complex border systems and power geometries when they have sought to enter the EU and its member states. The construction of the new “European” borders are inescapably connected to the efforts of the EU to integrate and negotiate, to “Europeanize” so to speak, border practices in Europe. But the recent attempts to generate supranational border practices have been contrasted by the phenomenon of nationalism. This ideological force perpetually pulls towards “national bordering” that reterritorializes the state in Europe. Secondly, the decision of the UK to “leave” the EU has been connected to the issue of Europe's internal borders. One of the most widely circulated explanations for Brexit is that voters



who felt a “burning injustice” voted against the putative “leaking” of the national borders of the United Kingdom. In such a view, Europe is exposed as a dysfunctional politico-spatial unit of social security in the age of globalization (Elliot, 2016).

### *Political movements and the articulations of Europe and the EU*

Fourthly and finally, post-Cold War spatial transformation is related to the European political movements (including political parties). These movements have adopted multiple ways to articulate – to legitimize or reject – European integration in their political agendas. The ways in which Europe and the EU in particular are articulated and performed by these movements is a topic that merits more scholarly attention. Indeed, European integration seems to supply political movements from the far left to the far right with notable rhetorical resources, as well as political resources. This is a timely issue when the processes of integration are inescapably entangled with the discourses of disintegration and growing nationalist sentiments. It is peculiar that many of the “Eurosceptical” movements are indeed only capable of existing and operating through the very same European political processes (such as the European Parliament elections) against which they argue and position themselves (see Moisisio *et al.*, 2013; Triandafyllidou *et al.*, 2009). Such groupings often operate with competing articulations and understandings of “EUrope” (see e.g. Feakins & Bialasiewicz, 2006; Mamadouh, 2009). Consider, for instance, some the political groupings in the member states, ranging through Italy, Sweden, Great Britain, Hungary and Finland, which often “flag the nation” by lumping together European integration and the threat of immigration (see Triandafyllidou *et al.*, 2009).

### **The territory work of the EU: The role of socio-technical practices and actors in the constitution of the EU territory**

### *On Europeanization as a geopolitical process*

The above-mentioned geopolitical aspects that have affected the post-Cold War spatial transformation of Europe disclose some of the peculiarities of the EU as a geopolitical actor: its territory is not fixed, it is a polity without a demos, it has no monopoly over the legitimate means for coercive power, it has no clearly defined centre of authority, and the very purpose of EU power is constantly renegotiated (see also Zielonka, 2007). Even if the EU lacks some of the political capacities that are normally associated with the modern state, the EU can be regarded as a significant geopolitical actor that operates both within and beyond its jurisdictions and through both formal and more subtle bureaucratic practices (Bachmann, 2016b; Kuus, 2015; Moisiu, 2011).

This process is often discussed under the concept of Europeanization, the term which Robert Ladrech (1994) coined in the early 1990s to denote the process through which EU power gets constructed through ideational diffusion and the institutionalisation of particular, purportedly “European” policy paradigms and styles of doing things. These then become embedded in the fabric of the member states, subnational regions, localities, and neighbourhoods. In a nutshell, Europeanization stands for asserting both explicit and implicit political and economic control over political institutions and actors through various governmental technologies. As a geopolitical process, Europeanization can be understood as being connected to the reterritorialization of the state: the relocating of state power firstly to an array of supranational institutions, secondly to cities and regions, and thirdly to non-state institutions (Amin, 2002; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999).

Europeanization may take a rather bureaucratic form whereby the European Commission, for instance, seeks to make the applicant states or member states accept its political norms and

standards by applying economic and political incentives and punishments. To illustrate, the EU's politics of conditionality, a significant political and cultural process through which political elites within the applicant states are taken into the EU "learning machine" during the EU accession process, aptly characterizes EU power. This power is not based on coercive force but rather on a kind of value-based normative force (see Bialasiewicz, 2008; Manners, 2002; Moisio *et al.*, 2013).

Europeanization may also denote how certain policy ideas within the member states or within sub-national regions may affect policy-making within the EU. As such, Europeanization also involves processes of policy transfer and mobility which take place both within and outside the jurisdictions of the EU. This includes a significant amount of institutionalized and more informal interaction between different kinds of actors. Europeanization can thus be comprehended as a process of defining the content of desired European development and fostering the EU's standing in world affairs. In sum, Europeanization as a geopolitical process implies expanding the EU territory at its outer edges, constructing and maintaining its power within the EU, as well as developing its influence beyond its formal geographical and jurisdictional reach (e.g. Bialasiewicz, 2011: 3; Kuus, 2011a; Scott, 2011; Vaughan-Williams, 2011).

#### *On the territory work of the EU: European spatial planning in a nutshell*

In the ensuing pages, we deal with the constitution of the EU territory as a sort of strategic space for EU activities in so-called European spatial planning. We also interrogate the ongoing production of the territorial basis of the EU territory in the so-called ESPON (European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion, formerly known as European Spatial Planning Observation Network) network. In the 2000s, ESPON and other EU-funded spatial projects constituted a significant body of the territory work of the EU. Our conceptualization draws from a theoretical

standing in human geography which posits that territory is constituted through and in networked socio-technical practices (Luukkonen & Moisio, 2016; Painter, 2010).

European spatial planning represents a notable attempt to consolidate, standardize and routinize the EU territorially around particular supranational political-geographical imaginaries which resonate with the broader political strategies of the EU. European spatial planning can be understood as the most explicit attempt to constitute a new territory for the EU and to identify a range of new “regions” in Europe (see e.g. Deas & Lord, 2006; Moisio & Luukkonen, 2015). European spatial planning is a geopolitical intervention which seeks to rework the existing and obviously too state-centred territorial formations. A notable milestone in the development of an EU-wide spatial system was the publication of a political document titled *European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union* in 1999. This has been called the “mother document” of European spatial planning (Faludi, 2010), and it has been followed by a series of other documents, as presented in table 1.

Table 1. Selected key strategy documents of European spatial planning which have guided the territory work of the EU since the publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective. (CEC = Commission of the European Communities)

Year	Document	Source
2001	Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion Policy, 2007–2013	CEC
2007	Territorial Agenda of the European Union: Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions	EU Ministerial Meeting
2008	Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion: Turning territorial diversity into strength	CEC
2009	An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations	Fabrizio Barca
2010	EUROPE 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth	CEC
2011	Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards An Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions	EU Ministerial Meeting
2014	“Making Europe Open and Polycentric” Vision and Scenarios for the European Territory towards 2050	ESPON 2013 Programme
2015	European Structural and Investment Funds 2014–2020: Official texts and commentaries	CEC
2016	Establishing the Urban Agenda for the EU	EU Ministerial Meeting

The European Spatial Development Perspective articulates “a vision of the future territory of the EU” (CEC, 1999: 11). The degree to which this vision, which highlights the role of city networks in creating non-contiguous EU regions, has taken any concrete material form is of course debatable. But it is more important to recognize that the European Spatial Development Perspective and other focal documents of European spatial planning convey a spatial policy vision and a will for this vision to be applied in different national contexts in different issues.

The European Spatial Development Perspective discloses the attempts of the European Commission in particular to promote economic competitiveness by encouraging policy-makers to understand the sheer importance of creating new internationally oriented urban spaces and networks of economic dynamism which would buttress the EU’s policies of competitiveness. Within European spatial planning, these transnational cross-border regions are considered key spaces in order to reduce territorial disparities within the EU and thus in order to meet the social requirements of integration in the name of “territorial cohesion”.

Since the turn of the millennium, the ideas of the European Spatial Development Perspective have not only been developed in its central follow-up documents but also incorporated into the EU’s structural funds and spatial knowledge production system. At the level of representations, rationalities and techniques, European spatial planning displays a will to bring into being a rationalized territorial structure which could serve as a framework for the EU’s balanced economic, social and even cultural constitution. In sum, even though the EU has limited competencies within the field of spatial planning and regional development, the European Commission has construed a supranational spatial planning vision and related institutional competencies for the materialization

of such a vision through EU projects/programmes, expert networks and ESPON since the early 2000s.

*On the actors of the territory work and the discourses of European spatial planning*

Within European spatial planning, local elites across Europe become engaged in multilayered regional diplomacy networks which function beyond the direct guidance of the member state governments. Actors within these networks thus become EU actors, representatives of its political authority, often without even noticing that they operate within the political strategies of the EU and, indeed, in the name of the EU (Moisio, 2011). Activities within these networks constitute the territory work of the EU, in other words the more or less routinized practices through which the central discursive frames of European spatial planning are enacted in EU-funded expert networks. These bring together civil servants, city and regional planners, academic researchers and consultants. In its current form, EU territory work began in the 1990s. It resulted from the entangled processes of not only consolidating the EU spatially but also enhancing its international economic competitiveness vis-à-vis its economic rivals in Asia and North America.

The territory work within European spatial planning is based on an ideal of learning. It discloses a form of “soft governance” which functions through governing techniques such as performance indicators and policy reviews (cf. Faludi, 2004). These techniques have sought to enable effective policy evaluation and learning through peer review and peer pressure in a number of policy sectors at the European level (Moisio & Luukkonen, 2015).

The territory work within European spatial planning is played out through different kinds of calculative socio-technical practices of analyzing, mapping and making comparisons of various

phenomena within the EU. The numerous fact sheets, regional statistics, rankings, reports and maps that are produced within the European spatial planning activities in and with the help of Eurostat and other “fact offices” together bring into existence a supposedly objective picture of EU territory as a policy object. These socio-technical practices are hence constitutive of EU territory (Painter, 2010; see also Luukkonen & Moisio, 2016). In such a view, EU territory is a structural effect of different kinds of calculative practices that result from networked social relations. Without these practices EU territory could not exist as a policy object.

The territory work of the EU inescapably reflects the dominant political strategies of European integration. The construction of the European Single Market in the early 1990s was predicated upon a view that the European states were too small to compete on the conceivable global sphere in the age of purportedly new capitalist globalization. From the 1990s onwards, the European debate on competitiveness has been predicated on a view that European problems with competitiveness had to do with the territorial organization of the EU (Moisio, 2011).

European spatial planning is built upon an emphasis on market needs, the fundamentals of economic growth, and the idea of enhancing the international competitiveness and attractiveness of the EU as an investment landscape. The emphasis of the global economic integration zones (CEC, 1999), for instance, demonstrates how the EU seeks to megaregionalize itself through a set of cross-border regions (Jonas & Moisio, 2016). In European spatial planning the role of megaregions (for the concept, see Harrison & Hoyler, 2015) as the geographical anchors of economic competitiveness has been connected to the imaginaries of highly globalized city regions that would serve as entrepreneurial hubs at the pinnacle of the new urban hierarchy of the EU. European spatial planning is thus at least implicitly premised on an idea that the US-style megaregion is the globally competitive urban form. Eventually, the internal functionality and inter-megaregional connectivity

also require the construction of new logistics and transport infrastructures that would serve as one of the crucial spatial anchors of the supranational EU territory (see also Jensen & Richardson, 2004).

Since the 1990s the problem of competitiveness has been articulated as a need to move away from the “resource economy” towards the “knowledge economy” or the “information society” (however these are articulated – for their different meanings, see Webster, 2006). The discourses of European spatial planning and the discourses of the European knowledge-based economy are entangled. Indeed, in the 1990s the rise in the discourses and material practices of the knowledge-based economy took place concomitantly with the rise of the territorial agendas of the EU. Since the 1990s, the knowledge-based economy can be understood as an attempt by the western capitalist states and major international organizations connected to global capitalism to manage the economic and political crisis tendencies which became evident in the late 1980s. As a form of crisis management, in the context of the EU the knowledge-based economy was about a particular envisioning of the future system of capital accumulation, wealth creation, and economic and political success. Its short history and fragmented composition notwithstanding, the knowledge economy has proven to be a powerful discursive construct in the context of the EU. As Jessop (2004: 168) argued already well over a decade ago, the knowledge-based economy has become a dominant and even a hegemonic discourse across scales and localities

that can frame broader struggles over political, intellectual and moral leadership on various scales as well as over more concrete fields of technical and economic reform. The basic idea is being articulated on many scales from local to global, in many organizational and institutional sites from firms to states, in many functional systems such as education, science,



health, welfare, law, and politics, as well as the economy in its narrow sense, and in the public sphere and in the lifeworld.

In the context of the EU, the “digital agenda” or “digital economy” is a concrete and more recent example of how the agenda of the knowledge-based economy has pervaded across various scales and spheres of politics and economy in Europe. As one of the core priorities or “Flagship Initiatives” of the Europe 2020 strategy, the digital agenda aims at strengthening the performance and innovativeness of the European economy by creating “a true single market for online content and services” by facilitating the transfer of economically valuable ideas and knowledge online and by providing access to global markets. However, the agenda reaches far beyond the economy and global markets to the spheres of European public policies, localities, households and citizens through various policy recommendations. These recommendations seek to promote “e-government”, the provision of “online services” and the development of “smart homes”, as well as to upgrade the “digital literacy” and “digital skills” of Europeans (European Commission, 2010: 12).

It is noticeable that the dominance of the knowledge-based economy would not have been possible without the leading role taken by some of the major industrial states, international organizations (such as the IMF, the WTO, the OECD), and major metropolitan regions, as well as the EU, in institutionalizing the basic discourses of the knowledge-based economy. This is exactly what has happened in the context of European spatial planning. The discourses and practices of the knowledge-based economy significantly condition European spatial planning and hence also set particular limits to the related territory work which takes place in various local action networks.

### **Territory work of the EU in practice: The ESPON project**

In this section, the territory work of the EU is discussed in more detail by using the example of the so-called ESPON programme. ESPON is an EU-funded research programme which produces and disseminates scientific information on spatial dynamics and characteristics in order to support European policy-making. The general aim of the programme is to promote and foster a European territorial dimension in spatial development and cooperation by providing evidence, knowledge transfer and policy learning to public authorities and other policy actors at all levels (ESPON, 2015: 2).

On a practical level, ESPON seeks to reach these goals by funding the production, dissemination and promotion of scientific information covering the 28 EU member states, as well as four partner states: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. During the first two periods, the programme has funded over one hundred research projects covering a wide range of themes relevant to European spatial policies. While the research projects have varied remarkably in terms of the research topics and methodological framings, the production of scientific information has been guided from the outset by certain principles. The information ought to be policy relevant and topical, as well as approachable and easily comparable and transferable. The information provided in the research projects should also be reliable and systematic (e.g. ESPON, 2015: 6). One significant principle throughout the life cycle of the programme has also been that the provided information must have European or EU-wide relevance. The rationale behind all these quality requirements is that European policymakers could make the most of the information in designing and implementing spatial policies effectively.

Along the various advisory panels, committees and expert groups, the ESPON programme plays an important role in assisting and informing spatial policies within the EU. With regard to the EU

territory work, the ESPON programme has a twofold role. First, the research projects as well as the various “learning events” (Moisio & Luukkonen, 2015) organized under ESPON activities bring together hundreds of European policymakers, administrators, scientists and other experts in the name of “Europe”. In other words, the ESPON programme opens spaces of Europeanization in which it is possible to speak and act upon the EU territory as a spatial entity and policy object. As such, the programme contributes to the production of the EU territory as an ideational space which is fluid and open to various interpretations and, therefore, in a constant process of becoming. Second, the ESPON research projects contribute to the “coding” (Painter, 2010) of the EU territory as a physical-material space not only by attaching different material and immaterial flows to it but also through the selected research topics and themes which highlight certain challenges and features being peculiar to the EU territory.

The ideational territory work and the more material territorial coding are co-constitutive dimensions of the ESPON programme and, together, essential for the constitution of the EU territory as a policy object. The scientific techniques deployed in the ESPON research projects turn the complex political, cultural, economic and social realities of the region into simplified abstractions that can be presented in compact statistical charts and cartographic illustrations. Moreover, they also contribute to the homogenization of the regional diversity of the EU by providing uniform and comparable information of its different parts which may eventually lead to harmonized and standardized policy recommendations and procedures (Luukkonen & Moisio, 2016).

The territory work in the ESPON programme is tightly regulated by the EU’s topical political agendas and goals. Besides the aims of promoting a “European territorial dimension” in spatial development policies and of providing scientific evidence, and promoting knowledge transfer and policy learning among policy actors, the programme also aims at supporting the reinforcement of

the effectiveness of the EU's cohesion and other sectoral policies as well as national and regional territorial development policies. The current programme, for instance, pays specific attention to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy by monitoring the achievement of the country-specific targets of the strategy "with clear indicators, conditionalities and performance incentives, linked to economic governance, to measure the effectiveness of policy intervention and thereby contributing to the overall aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (ESPON, 2015: 3).

The territory work in the ESPON research projects is also essentially conditioned by the broader political strategies of the EU and by the underlying political rationalities. The launching of the first ESPON programme took place at approximately the same time as when the European Commission published a white paper on European governance. The document was a response to the criticism expressed towards the weak legitimacy and lack of transparency and democracy of the EU's governance. Among many other reforms, in the document the Commission proposed the strengthening of the role of expertise in the EU's policymaking by stating that

Scientific and other experts play an increasingly significant role in preparing and monitoring decisions. From human and animal health to social legislation, the Institutions rely on specialist expertise to anticipate and identify the nature of the problems and uncertainties that the Union faces, to take decisions and to ensure that risks can be explained clearly and simply to the public (European Commission, 2001: 19)

The underlying idea for strengthening the role of experts was to increase the effectiveness and performativity of the EU's policymaking and the launching of the ESPON programme suited this objective, especially when it came to European spatial planning and development policies. Since

then, the ESPON programme has become “a mainstay of European spatial planning/territorial cohesion policy” and a “well-oiled [learning] machine” (Faludi, 2010: 146) in which the policymakers and researchers collaborate in identifying, diagnosing and finding solutions to “European” policy problems and challenges.

Although the strengthening of the role of scientific and other experts in the EU’s policymaking is often justified by the need to improve the knowledge base of the policies, academics and the scientific knowledge they provide are also considered a significant resource in the EU’s economic restructuring. This comes clearly out in the European Commission’s green paper on the future of science in Europe. The paper states that:

There is a vast store of new knowledge and information in the results of the projects funded in the area of the socio-economic sciences and humanities under the European Framework Programmes of Research. *Harnessing this information in order to inform policy-making is a major priority, if [...] Europe is to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world.*” (European Commission, 2008: 9, emphasis added)

Thus, both the strengthening of the role of expertise in EU policymaking in general and the launching of the ESPON programme in particular embody per se the EU’s leading political strategy of turning the continent into the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”, as pretentiously stated in the Lisbon strategy in 2000 (European Council, 2000: 5).

However, a more detailed look at the ESPON activities reveals that the strategy of the European knowledge-based economy has also significantly affected the practices of the territory work within the programme. This is not a surprise for, apart from being a strategy for restructuring of the EU

economy, the knowledge-based economy is also a territorializing strategy which has already framed the EU's spatial development policies for nearly two decades (Luukkonen & Moisio, 2016: 6). In the ESPON 2006 programme, the Lisbon strategy was explicitly involved in the activities of ESPON in the form of individual thematic and policy impact research projects which sought to explore the territorial aspects of the knowledge-based economy at different spatial scales. However, studies have shown that the strategy has become an axiomatic and normative framework which also conditions the policy and research practices in the more recent ESPON programmes (Luukkonen & Moisio, 2016).

## **Coda**

In this chapter, we have stressed that the spatial transformation of the EU is a dynamic discursive and material process which has taken several forms and has proceeded through a range of policy sectors. In particular, we have underscored the role of the territory work of the EU which takes place in a number of EU-funded initiatives and projects as an important research topic which opens up new insights into the socio-spatial transformation of the EU and into the nature of EU power more generally.

The research perspective we have outlined in this chapter can be utilized in the context of a number of spatial policy fields. One of the most topical of these touches upon the borders of the EU. From the 1990s onwards, the deepening of political and economic integration has been coupled with a process of dissolving the internal borders of the EU. This blurring of state borders within the EU has taken place in a number of policy sectors and manifested itself as significant institutional arrangements, such as the European Single Market, and has brought about the significant mobility of goods, money capital, people and even production capital. These border dynamics, in turn, have

been debated within the EU policy circles as phenomena which may merit increasing expert attention if the EU is to become a sort of functional region.

Moreover, knowledge production about the external borders of the EU has very recently become a pertinent policy question. More precisely, the recent flow of refugees from Syria and elsewhere has revealed the lack of harmonized knowledge on the EU borders and the relationship between EU borders, the borders of the member states and the borders of neighbour states more generally. Given that the EU has sought to harmonize its external bordering practices through the particular institutional arrangement of Frontex it is highly likely that the territory work of the EU will significantly refocus on the borders of the EU in the years to come.

This refocusing will inescapably consider both the internal and external borders of the EU. Issues such as border control in the context of current migration and the refugee crisis have also brought into light the fragile and geopolitically sensitive nature of internal de-bordering within the EU. The fact that the physical borders between EU member states are becoming a reality again merits insightful scholarly analysis that focus on the interconnections between transnational mobilities and the perpetual nationalist processes of territorialization in various European contexts. More generally, the ongoing spatial transformation of Europe challenges researchers to continue the theoretical and empirical work that already began in the 1990s. Concepts such as assemblage illustrate the numerous theoretical possibilities that are available for those researchers who seek to understand the spatial transformation of Europe and the related processes of territorialization and deterritorialization.

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